



# **DIVEST DU**

## BOT Presentation Transcript

Board of Trustees Retreat

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## **Introduction - Nick Stubler**

Thank you for making time to engage with us this afternoon. My name is Nick Stubler, [I'm Lori Scott, I'm Kengo Nagaoka, I'm Maddy Gawler, I'm Erin Smith,] and we look forward to sharing our perspective and adding clarification to any of your questions afterwards. As you can see, many of our supporters came to demonstrate their support of divestment, and demand that the issue is given the attention it deserves. While they are now leaving to limit distractions from this presentation, they will not truly go away until the Board of Trustees fulfills its moral obligation to divest from climate catastrophe.

To be clear, today's presentation is about the urgency of the climate crisis. About the social and environmental costs of climate change, and the University of Denver's moral obligation to combat it. There are few issues of greater universal importance to the public good than climate change, and as an institution dedicated to the public good, it is imperative that DU treats this issue with the urgency it demands

## **The Environmental Urgency of the Climate Crisis - Nick Stubler**

All reasonable people acknowledge that climate change is real, it is anthropogenically driven, and it poses an existential threat to the future of humanity. As such, it is immoral, unacceptable, and untenable for a University with a mission dedicated to the public good to perpetuate and profit from climate catastrophe. 2015 was the hottest year on record, 2014 the second hottest, and 14 of the 15 hottest years on record have occurred since 2001. Last month was the 371st consecutive month of above average global temperatures.

Left unaddressed, climate change will create an unrecognizable planet within my generation's lifetime. Rising sea levels are expected to displace 150 million people by the end of this century, with major coastal cities including New York, LA, Shanghai, Mumbai, and Istanbul becoming uninhabitable and under water. Desertification will devastate crop production worldwide, leading to increased hunger and famine. Devastating super storms will hit with increased capacity and frequency. Conservative reports predict that over half of the earth's species will become extinct by the end of the century due to climate change. Experts estimate that upwards of 400,000 are already dying each year due to the effects of climate change, and expect this number to increase to 700,000 deaths by 2030. Each of these factors will increase international tension and lead to increased international conflict.

To make matters worse, because Carbon has an atmospheric lifespan of 1,000 years, these impacts will continue to affect humanity for the next millennium. As such, our actions or inactions today have a direct impact on every person for the next 1,000 years.

The rationale for divestments targeting of the fossil fuel industry is quite simple. The international community has unanimously agreed that global warming in excess of 2 degrees Celsius will have catastrophic consequences. It is worth noting that this threshold is very conservative, as it had to be to gain unanimous international support from states like Russia, Saudi Arabia, and the US. And while scientists agree that humanity can only burn an additional 565 gigatons of carbon before surpassing this 2-degree threshold, the fossil fuel industry has unequivocally promised their shareholders to burn the entirety of their carbon reserves totaling 2,795 gigatons. To be blunt, without any further exploration, the fossil fuel industry has already committed to burning 5 times as much carbon as we can safely burn, an action that will violate the inalienable rights of humans for the next 1,000 years to live on a safe and hospitable planet. Thus, divestments focus on the fossil fuel industry is rooted in the catastrophic consequences of allowing the fossil fuel industry to maintain their status quo, and as a strategy to prevent them from doing so.

Not only does investing in the fossil fuel industry leave DU complicit in climate catastrophe, but it makes DU an active advocate for climate destruction. By connecting the financial stability of DU with the fossil fuel industry's ability to continue extracting, exploiting, and destroying our planet, you force DU to actively root for the success of this industry at the expense of the public good. Furthermore, by coupling financial aid to climate destruction, you force students with financial aid, like myself, to bear the cost of the fossil fuel industry's exploitation of the Earth and human bodies.

As an institution dedicated to the public good, DU has a moral obligation to urgently address climate change. And as informed human beings with agency, you each have a moral responsibility to take immediate action and vote to divest from fossil fuels this June.

## **The Urgency of the Climate Crisis to the Public Good - Lori Scott**

DU's vision is to be a great private university dedicated to the public good. Because few issues impact more people and beings on this planet than climate change, few issues have the potential to more significantly devastate the public good. As such, DU has an immediate responsibility to actively combat it. While climate catastrophe itself is indiscriminating, the systems of oppression that dominate society pre-dispose marginalized peoples to be victims of "environmental racism," or the reality that people of color and low income individuals are most likely to live near contamination, away from clean water, air, and soil, and to suffer most as a result of global warming. This phenomenon was clearly manifested during Hurricane Katrina when black Americans were stranded without food and water for days, their houses and neighborhoods washed away.

After the killing of unarmed black youth Mike Brown, a powerful movement arose based on the idea "Black Lives Matter." If we apply this idea that black and brown lives do in fact matter, the practices causing extreme climate degradation would not be allowed to occur, as their existence depends on the exploitation of those very bodies.

Furthermore, the popular notion of what counts as an appropriate response to the climate crisis comes from the same lens of superiority that created such destruction in the first place. For example, the idea that we can "safely" warm two degrees Celsius in global temperature does not tell the whole story. Delegates from developing nations have stated that even two degrees of warming is "suicide." It is based on the idea that white lives, not black or brown lives, matter and that the loss of life of poor people of color is an acceptable price to pay. Racism is to account for procrastination and the overall lack of a sense of urgency around climate action. It is morally unacceptable to make people of color carry the burden of environmental destruction. The refusal to acknowledge the

intersections of racial and environmental justice means compliance with the adverse effects of climate change and support of their continuation.

DU strives to be a more inclusive and impactful institution, simultaneously aiming to incorporate these same diverse communities of color into the university and sending our own students to study abroad the world over, including to developing nations. We say we hold those peoples and places close to our hearts, that they should be a part of our ONE DU. But how can we say we are working towards the betterment of all when our actions are contributing to the social hierarchy that disadvantages, and even destroys, the marginalized communities we claim to want to elevate?

Being a great private university dedicated to the public good, investment practices that continue institutional oppression are irreconcilable. At the University of Denver we aim to have a “culture steeped in ethics and social responsibility.” The dissonance between this vision and our investment practices that are directly responsible for perpetuating systemic violence detracts from the authority and integrity of our institution. How can you expect students and faculty to live up to being great individuals dedicated to the public good, when DU as an institution so explicitly refuses to do so? It is our moral duty, as people in positions of economic, political, and social power, to commit to divestment this June.

### **Why DU Needs to Act:**

#### **Divestment is an Effective Strategy to Combat Climate Change - Kengo Nagaoka**

We are here today in the recognition that fossil fuel divestment is an effective way to combat climate change. We believe that for DU, divestment from fossil fuels is one of the greatest actions the school can take to fulfill its moral obligation to combat climate change.

The strategy of divestment is commonly misunderstood to be financially driven. This is inaccurate. We fully realize that divestment will not have a significant financial impact on fossil fuel companies. Rather, the efficacy of divestment as a tool for social change is rooted in its power to morally stigmatize this industry.

The use of divestment as a tool for social change is not new. Since the 1970's, divestment movements have affected positive social change through targeting South Africa's apartheid regime and the tobacco industry. The apartheid campaign proved immensely successful, with Nelson Mandela crediting it as one of the most significant factors that led to the fall of apartheid. Similarly, the tobacco divestment movement was instrumental in condemning the ways in which the industry was spreading misinformation on the health effects of smoking by alienating politicians who took monetary contributions from the tobacco industry.

In both instances, divestment worked not because it financially bankrupted companies engaged in unjust practices, but because it morally bankrupted them. This moral stigmatization galvanized the public into action and shifted the societal paradigm to a point where effective public policy was able to be implemented.

Similarly, divestment from fossil fuels is not an end in itself, as those who focus on the financial impact misunderstand. Rather, divestment is a strategy for creating an environment where the ultimate solutions for addressing climate change can be enacted. We acknowledge that adequately addressing climate change will require the implementation of effective public policy.

But when more than half of our Senate refuses to accept the overwhelming scientific consensus that climate change is caused by human activity, it is imperative to change the political atmosphere so we can pursue effective policy. Fossil fuel divestment is meant to attack the political clout of the industry and create a societal environment where it is expected that morally sound

individuals come out in opposition to the fossil fuel industry and for a just transition into a sustainable future.

Universities are moral pillars in our community. By divesting from fossil fuels, universities send a powerful message to our larger community that siding with the fossil fuel industry is immoral. By remaining invested in fossil fuel companies, we not only remain complicit in their actions, but are actively tied to their success in burning all of their proven reserves. Pursuing LEED certification for our buildings and reevaluating where our energy comes from is simply not enough. The urgency of climate change demands that our institutions examine to every end how they are complicit in the immoral practices of the fossil fuel industry and take a powerful and confrontational stand against injustice.

Divesting the University of Denver from fossil fuels presents each of you with a tremendous opportunity to do your part in combatting climate change. If we can agree that destroying the climate is wrong, then profiting from that same ruin is clearly unethical. Committing to divestment will demonstrate the University of Denver's refusal to profit from the destruction of our environment. As leaders of a private institution dedicated to the public good, you have a responsibility to do all that is in your power to combat climate change, and vote this June to divest from fossil fuels.

## **Why DU Needs to Act:**

### **Divestment is in Our University's Best Interest - Maddy Gawler**

The question of divestment is not "if", but "when". The transition towards a fossil free economy is inevitable. At COP21 in Paris last December, 193 countries pledged to end the age of fossil fuels. Fossil fuels will become history; the debate now is simply over timelines. It is in the best interest of the University of Denver to divest from fossil fuels today for two key reasons.

First, financially, the value of fossil fuels stocks have plummeted in recent years. This year BP announced that its fourth quarter profits sunk by 70%, and Shell is predicting this year's profits to be cut in half. The peak of fossil fuel investments has passed. The future of investments lie with renewables and socially responsible solutions.

Even more striking than current returns, is the potential of stranded assets. If we are to prevent global warming in excess of 2 degrees Celsius, \$22 trillion worth of fossil fuel reserves already claimed on the balance sheets of the fossil fuel industry will need to remain underground. For this reason, the World Economic Forum calls Global Warming the single greatest risk to the global economy. Jeff Sachs, named the most important economist in the world by the New York Times, has called all fossil fuel companies lousy investments, urging institutions to divest from fossil fuels. The Governor of the Bank of England, the UK's central bank, has also said that the vast majority of carbon reserves are unburnable, and has advised investors to divest from the fossil fuel industry for purely financial reasons.

Your job as Board of Trustees members is to safeguard and grow our endowment. Every day that you don't divest, is a day at risk. It is a violation of your fiduciary responsibility to not seriously engage with this issue and vote to divest from fossil fuels.

Second, divestment aligns with DU's Impact 2025 and our long standing morals. The University of Denver is an innovative school that is pioneering the way for the Southwest. With divestment, DU would be the first major University in our region to divest, making us a regional leader. Millennials are prioritizing factors such as divestment and sustainability when they choose their college. Approximately  $\frac{2}{3}$  of students who responded to The Princeton Review's survey on hopes indicated that a college's commitment to the environment might impact their decision to apply to or attend the school. That was back in 2008, this percentage is rapidly increasing. By living

up to our name of Pioneer and being a climate leader through divestment, DU will distinguish itself as one of the top tier institutions of our country and strengthen the long term financial stability of the institution. Impact 2025 will make our name of pioneers a reality and Divestment is the perfect way to hit the ground running and show the University's strong commitment to its values. The 2025 plan dedicates the University towards developing 21st century leaders who contribute to and serve the public good. It calls on the University of Denver to serve the public good directly, and build an inclusive and engaging environment on campus. Climate Change is one of the most powerful crisis we face today. Let's band together as ONE DU and divest from the industry that is causing pain to so many.

By strengthening our financial stability, and re-aligning our practices with our vision, divestment will help DU to grow into the institution we all dream of. As trustees of the University of Denver, you have a responsibility to act in ways that benefit the long term success and prosperity of DU, and as such, you have a responsibility to vote this June to divest our endowment from fossil fuels.

## **Why DU Needs to Act:**

### **Align with Students, the Movement, and Our Future - Erin Smith**

To be clear, the divestment movement is international and growing rapidly. To date, institutions representing over 3.4 trillion dollars in assets have committed to divestment from fossil fuels. This includes philanthropies, religious organizations, prominent individuals, cities including Boulder and Seattle, and even the country of Norway. The Rockefellers, who made their fortune through the oil industry, divested their \$860 million philanthropic organization from all fossil fuel companies in late 2014, explaining that they were morally compelled to do so. Furthermore, the Rockefellers have since stated that their finances have not been negatively affected by this decision. Prominent figures including President Obama, UN Secretary General Ban Ki Moon, and World Bank President Jim Yong Kim have endorsed divestment as an effective tool for social change. Over 60 universities have partially or fully divested thus far, including Syracuse, Stanford, Oxford, and the entire University of California School System. On Tuesday, Yale moved to begin transitioning their endowment towards fossil fuel divestment. DU needs to join these universities in divesting in order to show our commitment to making our planet habitable for future generations of students.

DU's divestment movement has grown dramatically over the past two and a half years. We stand here today with students from all 4 classes who represent the voices of nearly 1,700 students, faculty, and community members have signed our petition, over 60 faculty members who have added their names to the Faculty Open Letter, and the unanimous endorsements from 24 student organizations ranging from Alpine Club, the oldest and largest student organization on campus, to the undergraduate student government. Therefore, the DU community that you represent stands behind this initiative, and calls on you to act on behalf of our voices.

It is important to emphasize that the divestment movement is a student led movement; Our generation will be the first to feel the most dire impacts of climate change, and as such, we are taking action across the world to demand a just and sustainable future. Many university administrations have decided to act only after students have stood up, shown their power, and demanded action on climate change. These escalations are led and coordinated by the Divestment Escalation Core, a group that consists of 8 schools, two of the most prominent being Swarthmore and Berkeley. These schools have taken non-violent direct action when they have been met with unresponsive administrations. These actions are escalating rapidly this Spring. On Tuesday, 120 students at UMASS Amherst sat in, with 15 of them being arrested. On the same day, 4 Harvard students were arrested for their direct actions. DU is one of the 8 national leaders in the Divestment Escalation

Core, and is the only campus in the core that has not engaged their campuses in acts of civil disobedience.

Divestment is what your current students want, and is what your future students need. If we believe, as is stated in DU's vision, that “the members of our community are united by a common purpose: They're determined to confront society's most pressing challenges,” then we must be asking ourselves if we are ALL truly living up to that standard. Our base is committed to achieving victory this June, and is prepared to take action as necessary to protect our futures and the lives of our children. We need you to listen to the voices of your students now and in the future and vote to divest from fossil fuels this June.

### **Our Asks - Nick Stubler**

First, we ask that the Board of Trustees votes in June to commit DU to immediately freeze any new investments in fossil fuel companies and divest from current holdings over the next five years. Second, we ask that you commit to reinvesting in just and sustainable solutions that champion the public good. To reach this goal, we ask that the Investment Committee fulfill its ethical obligation and fiduciary responsibility to the University by voting in favor of divestment within the next month, by May 14th, to allow the entire BOT to vote in June.

In the words of Albert Einstein, “Those who have the privilege to know have the duty to act.” You must each make a choice, to stand with students and our right to live on a safe and hospitable planet, or to stand with the fossil fuel industry in their violation of our inalienable human rights. There is no longer room for neutrality, and we need a response from the Investment Committee by May 14th. My generation, and generations to come, will judge your legacy based on this decision. We ask that you act in a way that your ancestors would be proud of, and that your descendants will be grateful for. We need you to vote in favor of divestment this June.